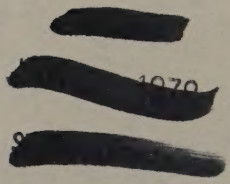

A PUSHCART AT THE CURB

JOHN DOS PASSOS

Books by John Dos Passos

NOVELS:

Three Soldiers

One Man's Initiation

Streets of Night
(*In Preparation*)

ESSAYS:

Rosinante to the Road Again

POEMS:

A Pushcart at the Curb

A PUSHCART AT THE CURB

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BY

JOHN DOS PASSOS

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A Pushcart at the Curb. I
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TO THE MEMORY

OF

WRIGHT McCORMICK

WHO TUMBLED OFF A MOUNTAIN

IN MEXICO

My verse is no upholstered chariot
Gliding oil-smooth on oiled wheels,
No swift and shining modern limousine,
But a pushcart, rather.

A crazy creaking pushcart, hard to push
Round corners, slung on shaky patchwork wheels,
That jolts and jumbles over the cobblestones
Its very various lading:

A lading of Spanish oranges, Smyrna figs,
Fly-specked apples, perhaps of the Hesperides,
Curious fruits of the Indies, pepper-sweet . . .
Stranger, choose and taste.

Dolo

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WINTER IN CASTILE

WINTER IN CASTILE

The promiscuous wind wafts idly from the quays
A smell of ships and curious woods and casks
And a sweetness from the gorse on the flowerstand
And brushes with his cool careless cheek the cheeks
Of those on the street; mine, an old gnarled man's,
The powdered cheeks of the girl who with faded eyes
Stands in the shadow; a sailor's scarred brown cheeks,
And a little child's, who walks along whispering
To her sufficient self.

O promiscuous wind.

Bordeaux

I

A long grey street with balconies.
Above the gingercolored grocer's shop
trail pink geraniums
and further up a striped mattress
hangs from a window
and the little wooden cage
of a goldfinch.

Four blind men wabble down the street
with careful steps on the rounded cobbles
scraping with violin and flute
the interment of a tune.

People gather:
women with market-baskets
stuffed with green vegetables,
men with blankets on their shoulders
and brown sunwrinkled faces.

Pipe the flutes, squeak the violins;
four blind men in a row
at the interment of a tune . . .
But on the plate
coppers clink
round brown pennies
a merry music at the funeral,
penny swigs of wine
penny gulps of gin
peanuts and hot roast potatoes
red disks of sausage
tripe steaming in the corner shop . . .

And overhead
the sympathetic finch
chirps and trills
approval.

Calle de Toledo, Madrid

II

A boy with rolled up shirtsleeves
turns the handle.
Grind, grind.
The black sphere whirls
above a charcoal fire.
Grind, grind.
The boy sweats and grits his teeth and turns
while a man blows up the coals.
Grind, grind.
Thicker comes the blue curling smoke,
the moka-scented smoke
heavy with early morning
and the awakening city
with click-clack click-clack on the cobblestones
and the young winter sunshine
advancing inquisitively
across the black and white tiles of my bedroom
floor.

Grind, grind.
The coffee is done.
The boy rubs his arms and yawns,
and the sphere and the furnace are trundled
away
to be set up at another café.

A poor devil
whose dirty ashen white body shows through
his rags
sniffs sensually
with dilated nostrils
the heavy coffee-fragrant smoke,
and turns to sleep again
in the feeble sunlight of the greystone steps.

Calle Espoz y Mina

III

Women are selling tuberoses in the square,
and sombre-tinted wreaths
stiffly twined and crinkly
for this is the day of the dead.

Women are selling tuberoses in the square.
Their velvet odor fills the street
somehow stills the tramp of feet;
for this is the day of the dead.

Their presence is heavy about us
like the velvet black scent of the flowers:
incense of pompous interments,
patter of monastic feet,
drone of masses drowsily said
for the thronging dead.

Women are selling tuberoses in the square
to cover the tombs of the envious dead
and shroud them again in the lethean scent
lest the dead should remember.

Difuntos; Madrid

IV

Above the scuffling footsteps of crowds
the clang of trams
the shouts of newsboys
the stridence of wheels,
very calm,
floats the sudden trill of a pipe
three silvery upward notes
wistfully quavering,
notes a Thessalian shepherd might have blown
to call his sheep
in the emerald shade
of Tempe,
notes that might have waked the mad women sleeping
among pinecones in the hills
and stung them to headlong joy
of the presence of their mad Iacchos,

notes like the glint of sun
making jaunty the dark waves of Tempe.

In the street an old man is passing
wrapped in a dun brown mantle
blowing with bearded lips on a shining panpipe
while he trundles before him
a grindstone.

The scissors grinder.

Calle Espoz y Mina

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V

Rain slants on an empty square.

Across the expanse of cobbles
rides an old shawl-muffled woman
black on a donkey with pert ears
that places carefully
his tiny sharp hoofs
as if the cobbles were eggs.
The paniers are full
of bright green lettuces
and purple cabbages,
and shining red bellshaped peppers,
dripping, shining, a band in marchtime,
in the grey rain,
in the grey city.

Plaza Santa Ana

VI

BEGGARS

The fountain some dead king put up,
conceived in pompous imageries,
piled with mossgreened pans and centaurs
topped by a prudish tight-waisted Cybele
(Cybele the many-breasted mother of the grain)
spurts with a solemn gurgle of waters.

Where the sun is warmest
their backs against the greystone basin
sit, hoarding every moment of the palefaced sun,
(thy children Cybele)
Pan a bearded beggar with blear eyes;
his legs were withered by a papal bull,
those shaggy legs so nimble to pursue
through groves of Arcadian myrtle
the nymphs of the fountains and valleys;
a young Faunus with soft brown face

and dirty breast bared to the sun;
the black hair crisps about his ears
with some grace yet;
a little barefoot Eros
crouching to scratch his skinny thighs
who stares with wide gold eyes aghast
at the yellow shiny trams that clatter past.

All day long they doze in the scant sun
and watch the wan leaves rustle to the ground
from the yellowed limetrees of the avenue.
They are still thine Cybele
nursed at thy breast;
(like a woman's last foster-children
that still would suck grey withered dugs).
They have not scorned thy dubious bounty
for stridence of grinding iron
and pale caged lives
made blind by the dust of toil
to coin the very sun to gold.

Plaza de Cibeles

VII

Footsteps
and the leisurely patter of rain.

Beside the lamppost in the alley
stands a girl in a long sleek shawl
that moulds vaguely to the curves
of breast and arms.
Her eyes are in shadow.

A smell of frying fish;
footsteps of people going to dinner
clatter eagerly through the lane.
A boy with a trough of meat on his shoulder
turns by the lamppost,
his steps drag.
The green light slants
in the black of his eyes.
Her eyes are in shadow.

Footsteps of people going to dinner
clatter eagerly; the rain
falls with infinite nonchalance . . .
a man turns with a twirl of moustaches
and the green light slants on his glasses
on the round buttons of his coat.
Her eyes are in shadow.

A woman with an umbrella
keeps her eyes straight ahead
and lifts her dress
to avoid the mud on the pavingstones.

An old man stares without fear
into the eyes of the girl
through the stripes of the rain.
His steps beat faster and he sniffs hard suddenly
the smell of dinner and frying fish.
Was it a flame of old days
expanding in his cold blood,

or a shiver of rigid graves,
chill clay choking congealing?

Beside the lamppost in the alley
stands a girl in a long sleek shawl
that moulds vaguely to the curves
of breast and arms.

Calle del Gato

VIII

A brown net of branches
quivers above silver trunks of planes.
Here and there
a late leaf flutters
its faint death-rattle in the wind.
Beyond, the sky burns fervid rose
like red wine held against the sun.

Schoolboys are playing in the square
dodging among the silver tree-trunks
collars gleam and white knees
as they romp shrilly.

Lamps bloom out one by one
like jessamine, yellow and small.
At the far end a church's dome
flat deep purple cuts the sky.

Schoolboys are romping in the square
in and out among the silver tree-trunks
out of the smoked rose shadows
through the timid yellow lamplight . . .
Socks slip down
fingermarks smudge white collars;
they run and tussle in the shadows
kicking the gravel with muddied boots
with cheeks flushed hotter than the sky
eyes brighter than the street-lamps
with fingers tingling and breath fast:
banqueters early drunken
on the fierce cold wine of the dead year.

Paseo de la Castellana

IX

Green against the livid sky
in their square dun-colored towers
hang the bronze bells of Castile.
In their unshakeable square towers
jutting from the slopes of hills
clang the bells of all the churches
the dustbrown churches of Castile.

How they swing the green bronze bells
athwart olive twilights of Castile
till their fierce insistant clangour
rings down the long plowed slopes
breaks against the leaden hills
whines among the trembling poplars
beside sibilant swift green rivers.

O you strong bells of Castile
that commanding clang your creed

over treeless fields and villages
that huddle in arroyos, gleaming
orange with lights in the greenish dusk;
can it be bells of Castile,
can it be that you remember?

Groans there in your bronze green curves
in your imperious evocation
stench of burnings, rattling screams
quenched among the crackling flames?
The crowd, the pile of faggots in the square,
the yellow robes. . . . Is it that
bells of Castile that you remember?

Toledo—Madrid

X

The Tagus flows with a noise of wiers through
Aranjuez.
The speeding dark-green water mirrors the old red
walls
and the balustrades and close-barred windows of
the palace;
and on the other bank three stooping washerwomen
whose bright red shawls and piles of linen gleam
in the green,
the swirling green where shimmer the walls of
Aranjuez.

There's smoke in the gardens of Aranjuez
smoke of the burning of the years' dead leaves;
the damp paths rustle underfoot
thick with the crisp broad leaves of the planes.

The tang of the smoke and the reek of the box
and the savor of the year's decay

are soft in the gardens of Aranjuez
where the fountains fill silently with leaves
and the moss grows over the statues and busts
clothing the simpering cupids and fauns
whose stone eyes search the empty paths
for the rustling rich brocaded gowns
and the neat silk calves of the halcyon past.

The Tagus flows with a noise of wiers through Aranjuez.
And slipping by mirrors the brown-silver trunks of the planes and the hedges
of box and spires of cypress and alleys of yellowing elms;
and on the other bank three grey mules pulling a cart
loaded with turnips, driven by a man in a blue woolen sash
who strides along whistling and does not look towards Aranjuez.

XI

Beyond ruffled velvet hills
the sky burns yellow like a candle-flame.

Sudden a village
roofs against the sky
leaping buttresses
a church
and a tower utter dark like the heart
of a candleflame.

Swing the bronze-bells
uncoiling harsh slow sound through the dusk
that growls out in the conversational clatter
Of the trainwheels and the rails.

A hill humps unexpectedly to hide
the tower erect like a pistil
in the depths of the tremendous flaming
flower of the west.

Getafe

XII

Genteel noise of Paris hats
and beards that tilt this way and that.
Mirrors create on either side
infinities of chandeliers.

The orchestra is tuning up:
Twanging of the strings of violins
groans from cellos
toodling of flutes.

Legs apart, with white fronts
the musicians stand
amiably as pelicans.

Tap. Tap. Tap.
With a silken rustle beards, hats
sink back in appropriate ecstasy.
A little girl giggles.
Crystals of infinities of chandeliers
tremble in the first long honey-savored chord.

From under a wide black hat
curving just to hide her ears
peers the little face of Juliet
of all child lovers
who loved in impossible gardens
among roses huge as moons
and twinkling constellations of jessamine,
Juliet, Isabel, Cressida,
and that unknown one who went forth at night
wandering the snarling streets of Jerusalem.

She presses her handkerchief to her mouth
to smother her profane giggling.
Her skin is browner than the tone of cellos,
flushes like with pomegranate juice.

. . . The moist laden air of a garden in
Granada,
spice of leaves bruised by the sun;
she sits in a dress of crimson brocade
dark as blood under the white moon
and watches the ripples spread

in the gurgling fountain;
her lashes curve to her cheeks
as she stares wide-eyed
lips drawn against the teeth and trembling;
gravel crunches down the path;
brown in a crimson swirl
she stands with full lips
head tilted back . . . O her small breasts
against my panting breast.

Clapping. Genteel noise of Paris hats
and beards that tilt this way and that.

Her face lost in infinities of glittering chandeliers.

Ritz

XIII

There's a sound of drums and trumpets
above the rumble of the street.
(Run run run to see the soldiers.)
All alike all abreast keeping time
to the regimented swirl
of the glittering brass band.

The café waiters are craning at the door
the girl in the gloveshop is nose against the glass.
O the glitter of the brass
and the flutter of the plumes
and the tramp of the uniform feet!
Run run run to see the soldiers.

The boy with a tray
of pastries on his head
is walking fast, keeping time;
his white and yellow cakes are tremoling in the
sun

his cheeks are redder
and his bluestriped tunic streams
as he marches to the rum tum of the drums.
Run run run to see the soldiers.

The milkman with his pony
slung with silvery metal jars
schoolboys with their packs of books
clerks in stiff white collars
old men in cloaks
try to regiment their feet
to the glittering brass beat.
Run run run to see the soldiers.

Puerta del Sol

XIV

Night of clouds
terror of their flight across the moon.
Over the long still plains
blows a wind out of the north;
a laden wind out of the north
rattles the leaves of the liveoaks
menacingly and loud.

. . . .

Black as old blood on the cold plain
close throngs spread to beyond lead horizons
swaying shrouded crowds
and their rustle in the knife-keen wind
is like the dry death-rattle of the winter grass.

(Like mouldered shrouds the clouds fall
from the crumbling skull of the dead moon.)

Huge, of grinning brass
steaming with fresh stains

their God
gapes with smudged expectant gums
above the plain.

Flicker through the flames of the wide maw
rigid square bodies of men
opulence of childbearing women
slimness of young men, and girls
with small curved breasts.

(Loud as musketry rattles the sudden laughter of
the dead.)

Thicker hotter the blood drips
from the cold brass lips.

Swift over grainless fields
swift over shellplowed lands
ever leaner swifter darker
bay the hounds of the dead,
before them drive the pale ones
white limbs scarred and blackened

laurel crushed in their cold fingers,
the spark quenched in their glazed eyes.

Thicker hotter the blood drips
from the avenging lips
of the brass God;
(and rattling loud as musketry
the laughter of the unsated dead).

. . . .

The clouds have blotted the haggard moon.
A harsh wind shrills from the cities of the north
Ypres, Lille, Liège, Verdun,
and from the tainted valleys
the cross-scarred hills.
Over the long still plains
the wind out of the north
rattles the leaves of the liveoaks.

Cuatro Caminos

XV

The weazened old woman without teeth
who shivers on the windy street corner
displays her roasted chestnuts invitingly
like marriageable daughters.

Calle Atocha

XVI

NOCHEBUENA

The clattering streets are bright with booths
lighted by balancing candleflames
ranged with figures in painted clay,
Virgins adoring and haloed bambinos,
St. Joseph at his joiner's bench
Judean shepherds and their sheep
camels of the Eastern kings.

Esta noche es noche buena
nadie piensa a dormir.

The streets resound with dancing
and chortle of tambourines,
strong rhythm of dancing
drumming of tambourines.

Flicker through the greenish lamplight
of the clattering cobbled streets
flushed faces of men

women in mantillas
children with dark wide eyes,
teeth flashing as they sing:

La santa Virgen es en parto
a las dos va desparir.
Esta noche es noche buena
nadie piensa a dormir.

Beetred faces of women
whose black mantillas have slipped
from their sleek and gleaming hair,
streaming faces of men.

With click of heels on the pavingstones
boys in tunics are dancing
eyes under long black lashes
flash as they dance to the drum
of tambourines beaten with elbow and palm.
A flock of girls comes running
squealing down the street.

Boys and girls are dancing
flushed and dripping dancing
to the beat on drums and piping
on flutes and jiggle
of the long notes of accordions
and the wild tune swirls and sweeps
along the frosty streets,
leaps above the dark stone houses
out among the crackling stars.

Esta noche es noche buena
nadie piensa a dormir.

In the street a ragged boy
too poor to own a tambourine
slips off his shoes and beats them together
to the drunken reeling time,
dances on his naked feet.

Esta noche es noche buena
nadie piensa a dormir.

Madrid

XVII

The old strong towers the Moors built
on the ruins of a Roman camp
have sprung into spreading boistrous foam
of daisies and alyssum flowers,
and sprout of clover and veiling grass
from out of the cracks in the tawny stones
makes velvet soft the worn stairs
and grooved walks where clanked the heels
of the grave mailed knights who had driven and killed
the darkskinned Moors,
and where on silken knees their sons
knelt on the nights of the full moon
to vow strange deeds for their lady's grace.

The old strong towers are crumbled and doddering now
and sit like old men smiling in the sun.

About them clamber the giggling flowers
and below the sceptic sea gently
laughing in daisywhite foam on the beach
rocks the ships with flapping sails
that flash white to the white village on the shore.

On a wall where the path is soft with flowers
the brown goatboy lies, his cap askew
and whistles out over the beckoning sea
the tune the village band jerks out,
a shine of brass in the square below:
a swaggering young buck of a tune
that slouches cap on one side, cigarette
at an impudent tilt, out past the old
toothless and smilingly powerless towers,
out over the ever-youthful sea
that claps bright cobalt hands in time
and laughs along the tawny beaches.

Denia

XVIII

How fine to die in Denia
young in the ardent strength of sun
calm in the burning blue of the sea
in the stabile clasp of the iron hills;
Denia where the earth is red
as rust and hills grey like ash.
O to rot into the ruddy soil
to melt into the omnipotent fire
of the young white god, the flamegod the sun,
to find swift resurrection
in the warm grapes born of earth and sun
that are crushed to must under the feet
of girls and lads,
to flow for new generations of men
a wine full of earth
of sun.

XIX

The road winds white among ashen hills
grey clouds overhead
grey sea below.
The road clings to the strong capes
hangs above the white foam-line
of unheard breakers
that edge with lace the scarf of the sea
sweeping marbled with sunlight
to the dark horizon
towards which steering intently
like ducks with red bellies
swim the black laden steamers.

The wind blows the dust of the road
and whines in the dead grass
and is silent.

I can hear my steps
and the clink of coins in one pocket
and the distant hush of the sea.

On the highroad to Villajoyosa

XX

SIERRA GUADARRAMA

TO J. G. P.

The greyish snow of the pass
is starred with the sad lilac
of autumn crocuses.

Hissing among the brown leaves
of the scruboaks
bruising the tender crocus petals
a sleetgust sweeps the pass.

The air is calm again.
Under a bulging sky motionless overhead
the mountains heave velvet black
into the cloudshut distance.

South the road winds
down a wide valley
towards stripes of rain

through which shine straw yellow
faint as a dream
the rolling lands of New Castile.

A fresh gust whines through the snowbent grass
pelting with sleet the withering crocuses,
and rustles the dry leaves of the scruboaks
with a sound as of gallop of hoofs
far away on the grey stony road
a sound as of faintly heard cavalcades
of old stern kings
climbing the cold iron passes
stopping to stare with cold hawkeyes
at the pale plain.

Puerta de Navecerrada

XXI

Soft as smoke are the blue green pines
in the misty lavender twilight
yellow as flame the flame-shaped poplars
whose dead leaves fall
vaguely spinning through the tinted air
till they reach the brownish mirror of the stream
where they are borne a tremulous pale fleet
over gleaming ripples to the sudden dark
beneath the Roman bridge.

Forever it stands the Roman bridge
a firm strong arch in the purple mist
and ever the yellow leaves are swirled
into the darkness beneath
where echoes forever the tramp of feet
of the weary feet that bore
the Eagles and the Law.

And through the misty lavender twilight
the leaves of the poplars fall and float
with the silent stream to the deep night
beneath the Roman bridge.

Cercedilla

XXII

In the velvet calm of long grey slopes of snow
the silky crunch of my steps.
About me vague dark circles of mountains
secret, listening in the intimate silence.

Bleating of sheep, the bark of a dog
and, dun-yellow in the snow
a long flock straggles.
Crying of lambs,
twitching noses of snowflecked ewes,
the proud curved horns of a regal broadgirthed
ram,
yellow backs steaming;
then, tails and tracks in the snow,
and the responsible lope of the dog
who stops with a paw lifted to look back
at the baked apple face of the shepherd.

Cercedilla

XXIII

JULIET

You were beside me on the stony path
down from the mountain.

And I was the rain that lashed such flame into
your cheeks
and the sensuous rolling hills
where the mists clung like garments.

I was the sadness that came out of the languid rain
and the soft dove-tinted hills
and choked you with the harsh embrace of a lover
so that you almost sobbed.

Siete Picos

XXIV

When they sang as they marched in step
on the long path that wound to the valley
I followed lonely in silence.

When they sat and laughed by the hearth
where our damp clothes steamed in the flare
of the noisy prancing flames
I sat still in the shadow
for their language was strange to me.

But when as they slept I sat
and watched by the door of the cabin
I was not lonely
for they lay with quiet faces
stroked by the friendly tongues
of the silent firelight
and outside the white stars swarmed
like gnats about a lamp in autumn
an intelligible song.

Cercedilla

XXV

I lie among green rocks
on the thyme-scented mountain.
The thistledown clouds and the sky
grey-white and grey-violet
are mirrored in your dark eyes
as in the changing pools of the mountain.

I have made for your head
a wreath of livid crocuses.
How strange they are the wan lilac crocuses
against your dark smooth skin
in the intense black of your wind-towseled hair.

Sleet from the high snowfields
snaps a lash down the mountain
bruising the withered petals
of the last crocuses.

I am alone in the swirling mist
beside the frozen pools of the mountain.

La Maliciosa

XXVI

Infinities away already
are your very slender body
and the tremendous dark of your eyes
where once beyond the laughingness of childhood,
came a breath of jessamine prophetic of summer,
a sudden flutter of yellow butterflies
above dark pools.

Shall I take down my books
and weave from that glance a romance
and build tinsel thrones for you
out of old poets' fancies?

Shall I fashion a temple about you
where to burn out my life like frankincense
till you tower dark behind the sultry veil
huge as Isis?

Or shall I go back to childhood
remembering butterflies in sunny fields
to cower with you when the chilling shadow fleets
across the friendly sun?

Bordeaux

XXVII

And neither did Beatrice and Dante . . .

But Beatrice they say

was a convention.

November, 1916—February, 1917.

NIGHTS AT BASSANO

I

DIRGE OF THE EMPRESS TAITU OF ABYSSINIA

And when the news of the Death of the Empress of that Far Country did come to them, they fashioned of her an Image in doleful wise and poured out Rum and Marsala Sack and divers Liquors such as were procurable in that place into Cannikins to do her Honor and did wake and keen and make moan most piteously to hear. And that Night were there many Marvels and Prodigies observed; the Welkin was near consumed with fire and Spirits and Banashees grumbled and wailed above the roof and many that were in that place hid themselves in Dens and Burrows in the ground. Of the swanlike and grievously melodious Ditties the Minstrels fashioned in that fearsome Night these only are preserved for the Admiration of the Age.

I

Our lady lies on a brave high bed,
On pillows of gold with gold baboons
On red silk deftly embroidered—
O anger and eggs and candlelight—
Her gold-specked eyes have little sight.

Our lady cries on a brave high bed;
The golden light of the candles licks
The crown of gold on her frizzly head—
O candles and angry eggs so white—
Her gold-specked eyes are sharp with fright.

Our lady sighs till the high bed creaks;
The golden candles gutter and sway
In the swirling dark the dark priest speaks—
O his eyes are white as eggs with fright
—Our lady will die twixt night and night.

Our lady lies on a brave high bed;
The golden crown has slipped from her head
On the pillows crimson embroidered—
O baboons writhing in candlelight —
Her gold-specked soul has taken flight.

II

ZABAGLIONE

Champagne-colored
Deepening to tawniness
As the throats of nightingales
Strangled for Nero's supper.

Champagne-colored
Like the coverlet of Dudloysha
At the Hotel Continental.

Thick to the lips and velvety
Scented of rum and vanilla
Oversweet, oversoft, overstrong,
Full of froth of fascination,

Drink to be drunk of Isoldes
Sunk in champagne-colored couches
While Tristans with fair flowing hair
And round cheeks rosy as cherubs
Stand and stretch their arms,
And let their great slow tears
Roll and fall,
And splash in the huge gold cups.

And behind the scenes with his sleeves rolled up,
Grandiloquently
Kurwenal beats the eggs
Into spuming symphonic splendor
Champagne-colored.

Red-nosed gnomes roll and tumble
Tussle and jumble in the firelight
Roll on their backs spinning rotundly,
Out of earthern jars
Gloriously gurgitating,
Wriggling their huge round bellies.

And the air of the cave is heavy
With steaming Marsala and rum
And hot bruised vanilla.

Champagne-colored, one lies in a velvetiness
Of yellow moths stirring faintly tickling wings
One is heavy and full of languor
And sleep is a champagne-colored coverlet,
the champagne-colored stockings of Venus . . .
And later
One goes
And pukes beautifully beneath the moon,
Champagne-colored.

II

ODE TO ENNUI

The autumn leaves that this morning danced with
the wind,
curtseying in slow minuettes,
giddily whirling in bacchanals,
balancing, hesitant, tiptoe,
while the wind whispered of distant hills,
and clouds like white sails, sailing
in limpid green ice-colored skies,
have crossed the picket fence
and the three strands of barbed wire;
they have leapt the green picket fence
despite the sentry's bayonet.

Under the direction of a corporal
three soldiers in khaki are sweeping them up,
sweeping up the autumn leaves,
crimson maple leaves, splotched with saffron,

ochre and cream,
brown leaves of horse-chestnuts . . .
and the leaves dance and curtsey round the brooms,
full of mirth,
wistful of the journey the wind promised them.

This morning the leaves fluttered gaudily,
reckless, giddy from the wind's dances,
over the green picket fence
and the three strands of barbed wire.
Now they are swept up
and put in a garbage can
with cigarette butts
and chewed-out quids of tobacco,
burnt matches, old socks, torn daily papers,
and dust from the soldiers' blankets.

And the wind blows tauntingly
over the mouth of the garbage can,
whispering, Far away,
mockingly, Far away . . .

And I too am swept up
and put in a garbage can
with smoked cigarette ash
and chewed-out quids of tobacco;
I am fallen into the dominion
of the great dusty queen . . .
Ennui, iron goddess, cobweb-clothed
goddess of all useless things,
of attics cluttered with old chairs
for centuries unsatupon,
of strong limbs wriggling on office stools,
of ancient cab-horses and cabs
that sleep all day in silent sunny squares,
of camps bound with barbed wire,
and green picket fences—
bind my eyes with your close dust
choke my ears with your grey cobwebs
that I may not see the clouds
that sail away across the sky,
far away, tauntingly,

that I may not hear the wind
that mocks and whispers and is gone
in pursuit of the horizon.

III

TIVOLI

TO D. P.

The ropes of the litter creak and groan
As the bearers turn down the steep path;
Pebbles scuttle under slipping feet.
But the Roman poet lies back confident
On his magenta cushions and mattresses,
Thinks of Greek bronzes
At the sight of the straining backs of his slaves.

The slaves' breasts shine with sweat,
And they draw deep breaths of the cooler air
As they lurch through tunnel after tunnel of leaves.
At last, where the spray swirls like smoke,
And the river roars in a cauldron of green,
The poet feels his fat arms quiver

And his eyes and ears drowned and exalted
In the reverberance of the fall.

The ropes of the litter creak and groan,
The embroidered curtains, moist with spray,
Flutter in the poet's face;
Pebbles scuttle under slipping feet
As the slaves strain up the path again,
And the Roman poet lies back confident
Among silk cushions of gold and magenta,
His hands clasped across his mountainous belly,
Thinking of the sibyll and fate,
And gorgeous and garlanded death,
Mouthing hexameters.

But I, my belly full and burning as the sun
With the good white wine of the Alban hills
Stumble down the path
Into the cool green and the roar,
And wonder, and am abashed.

IV

VENICE

The doge goes down in state to the sea
To inspect with beady traders' eyes
New cargoes from Crete, Mytilene,
Cyprus and Joppa, galleys piled
With bales off which in all the days
Of sailing the sea-wind has not blown
The dust of Arabian caravans.

In velvet the doge goes down to the sea.
And sniffs the dusty bales of spice
Pepper from Cathay, nard and musk,
Strange marbles from ruined cities, packed
In unfamiliar-scented straw.
Black slaves sweat and grin in the sun.
Marmosets pull at the pompous gowns
Of burgesses. Parrots scream
And cling swaying to the ochre bales . . .

Dazzle of the rising dust of trade
Smell of pitch and straining slaves . . .

And out on the green tide towards the sea
Drift the rinds of orient fruits
Strange to the lips, bitter and sweet.

V

ASOLO GATE

The air is drenched to the stars
With fragrance of flowering grape
Where the hills hunch up from the plain
To the purple dark ridges that sweep
Towards the flowery-pale peaks and the snow.

Faint as the peaks in the glister of starlight,
A figure on a silver-tinkling snow-white mule
Climbs the steeply twining stony road
Through murmuring vineyards to the gate
That gaps with black the wan starlight.

The watchman on his three-legged stool
Drowses in his beard, dreams
He is a boy walking with strong strides
Of slender thighs down a wet road,
Where flakes of violet-colored April sky

Have brimmed the many puddles till the road
Is as a tattered path across another sky.

The watchman on his threelegged stool,
Sits snoring in his beard;
His dream is full of flowers massed in meadow-
land,
Of larks and thrushes singing in the dawn,
Of touch of women's lips and twining hands,
And madness of the sprouting spring . . .
His ears a-sudden ring with the shrill cry:
Open watchman of the gate,
It is I, the Cyprian.

—It is ruled by the burghers of this town
Of Asolo, that from sundown
To dawn no stranger shall come in,
Be he even emperor, or doge's kin.
—Open, watchman of the gate,
It is I, the Cyprian.

—Much scandal has been made of late
By wandering women in this town.
The laws forbid the opening of the gate
Till next day once the sun is down.
—Watchman know that I who wait
Am Queen of Jerusalem, Queen
Of Cypress, Lady of Asolo, friend
Of the Doge and the Venetian State.

There is a sound of drums, and torches flare
Dims the star-swarm, and war-horns' braying
Drowns the fiddling of crickets in the wall,
Hoofs strike fire on the flinty road,
Mules in damasked silk caparisoned
Climb in long train, strange shadows in torch-
light,
The road that winds to the city gate.

The watchman, fumbling with his keys,
Mumbles in his beard:—Had thought
She was another Cyprian, strange the dreams

That come when one has eaten tripe.
The great gates creak and groan,
The hinges shriek, and the Queen's white mule
Stalks slowly through.

The watchman, in the shadow of the wall,
Looks out with heavy eyes:—Strange,
What cavalcade is this that clatters into Asolo?
These are not men-at-arms,
These ruddy boys with vineleaves in their hair!
That great-bellied one no seneschal
Can be, astride an ass so gauntily!
Virgin Mother! Saints! They wear no clothes!

And through the gate a warm wind blows,
A dizzying perfume of the grape,
And a great throng crying Cypris,
Cyprian, with cymbals crashing and a shriek
Of Thessalian pipes, and swaying of torches,
That smell hot like wineskins of resin,

That flare on arms empurpled and hot cheeks,
And full shouting lips vermillion-red.

Youths and girls with streaming hair
Pelting the night with flowers:
Yellow blooms of Adonis, white
scented stars of pale Narcissus,
Mad incense of the blooming vine,
And carmine passion of pomegranate blooms.

A-sudden all the strummings of the night,
All the insect-stirrings, all the rustlings
Of budding leaves, the sing-song
Of waters brightly gurgling through meadowland,
Are shouting with the shouting throng,
Crying Cypris, Cyprian,
Queen of the seafoam, Queen of the budding year,
Queen of eyes that flame and hands that twine,
Return to us, return from the fields of asphodel.

And all the grey town of Asolo
Is full of lutes and songs of love,
And vows exchanged from balcony to balcony
Across the singing streets . . .
But in the garden of the nunnery,
Of the sisters of poverty, daughters of dust,
The cock crows. The cock crows.

The watchman rubs his old ribbed brow:
Through the gate, in silk all dusty from the road,
Into the grey town asleep under the stars,
On tired mules and lean old war-horses
Comes a crowd of quarrelling men-at-arms
After a much-veiled lady with a falcon on her wrist.
—This Asolo? What a nasty silent town
He sends me to, that dull old doge.

And you, watchman, I've told you thrice
That I am Cypress's Queen, Jerusalem's,

And Lady of this dull village, Asolo;
Tend your gates better. Are you deaf,
That you stand blinking at me, pulling at your
dirty beard?
You shall be thrashed, when I rule Asolo.
—What strange dreams, mumbled in his beard
The ancient watchman, come from eating tripe.

VI

HARLEQUINADE

Shrilly whispering down the lanes
That serpent through the ancient night,
They, the scoffers, the scornful of chains,
Stride their turbulent flight.

The stars spin steel above their heads
In the shut irrevocable sky;
Gnarled thorn-branches tear to shreds
Their cloaks of pageantry.

A wind blows bitter in the grey,
Chills the sweat on throbbing cheeks,
And tugs the gaudy rags away
From their lean bleeding knees.

Their laughter startles the scarlet dawn
Among a tangled spiderwork

Of girdered steel, and shrills forlorn
And dies in the rasp of wheels.

Whirling like gay prints that whirl
In tatters of squalid gaudiness,
Borne with dung and dust in the swirl
Of wind down the endless street,

With thin lips laughing bitterly,
Through the day smeared in sooty smoke
That pours from each red chimney,
They speed unseemily.

Women with unlustered hair,
Men with huge ugly hands of oil,
Children, impudently stare
And point derisive hands.

Only . . . where a barrel organ thrills
Two small peak-chested girls to dance,
And among the iron clatter spills
A swiftening rhythmy song,

They march in velvet silkslashed hose,
Strumming guitars and mellow lutes,
Strutting pointed Spanish toes,
A stately company.

VII

TO THE MEMORY OF DEBUSSY

Good Friday, 1918.

This is the feast of death
We make of our pain God;
We worship the nails and the rod
and pain's last choking breath
and the bleeding rack of the cross.

The women have wept away their tears,
with red eyes turned on death, and loss
of friends and kindred, have left the biers
flowerless, and bound their heads in their blank veils,
and climbed the steep slope of Golgotha; fails
at last the wail of their bereavement,
and all the jagged world of rocks and desert places

stands before their racked sightless faces,
as any ice-sea silent.

This is the feast of conquering death.
The beaten flesh worships the swishing rod.
The lacerated body bows to its God,
adores the last agonies of breath.

And one more has joined the unnumbered
deathstruck multitudes
who with the loved of old have slumbered
ages long, where broods
Earth the beneficent goddess,
the ultimate queen of quietness,
taker of all worn souls and bodies
back into the womb of her first nothingness.

But ours, who in the iron night remain,
ours the need, the pain
of his departing.
He had lived on out of a happier age

into our strident torture-cage.
He still could sing
of quiet gardens under rain
and clouds and the huge sky
and pale deliciousness that is nearly pain.
His was a new minstrelsy:
strange plaints brought home out of the rich east,
twanging songs from Tartar caravans,
hints of the sounds that ceased
with the stilling dawn, wailings of the night,
echoes of the web of mystery that spans
the world between the failing and the rising of the
wan daylight
of the sea, and of a woman's hair
hanging gorgeous down a dungeon wall,
evening falling on Tintagel,
love lost in the mist of old despair.

Against the bars of our torture-cage
we beat out our poor lives in vain.

We live on cramped in an iron age
like prisoners of old
high on the world's battlements
exposed until we die to the chilling rain
crouched and chattering from cold
for all scorn to stare at.
And we watch one by one the great
stroll leisurely out of the western gate
and without a backward look at the strident city
drink down the stirrup-cup of fate
embrace the last obscurity.

We worship the nails and the rod
and pain's last choking breath.
We make of our pain God.
This is the feast of death.

VIII

PALINODE OF VICTORY

Beer is free to soldiers
In every bar and tavern
As the regiments victorious
March under garlands to the city square.

Beer is free to soldiers
And lips are free, and women,
Breathless, stand on tiptoe
To see the flushed young thousands in advance.

"Beer is free to soldiers;
Give all to the liberators" . . .
Under wreaths of laurel
And small and large flags fluttering, victorious,
They of the frock-coats, with clink of official chains,
Are welcoming with eloquence outpouring

The liberating thousands, the victorious;
In their speaking is a soaring of great phrases,
Balloons of tissue paper,
Hung with patriotic bunting,
That rise serene into the blue,
While the crowds with necks uptilted
Gaze at their upward soaring
Till they vanish in the blue;
And each man feels the blood of life
Rumble in his ears important
With participation in Events.

But not the fluttering of great flags
Or the brass bands blaring, victorious,
Or the speeches of persons in frock coats,
Who pause for the handclapping of crowds,
Not the stamp of men and women dancing,
Or the bubbling of beer in the taverns,—
Frothy mugs free for the victorious—,
Not all the trombone-droning of Events,

Can drown the inextinguishible laughter of the gods.

And they hear it, the old hooded houses,
The great creaking peak-gabled houses,
That gossip and chuckle to each other
Across the clattering streets;
They hear it, the old great gates,
The grey gates with towers,
Where in the changing shrill winds of the years
Have groaned the poles of many various-colored banners.
The poplars of the high-road hear it,
From their trembling twigs comes a dry laughing,
As they lean towards the glare of the city.
And the old hard-laughing paving-stones,
Old stones weary with the weariness
Of the labor of men's footsteps,
Hear it as they quake and clamour
Under the garlanded wheels of the yawning confident cannon

That are dragged victorious through the flutter of
the city.

Beer is free to soldiers,
Bubbles on wind-parched lips,
Moistens easy kisses
Lavished on the liberators.

Beer is free to soldiers
All night in steaming bars,
In halls delirious with dancing
That spill their music into thronging streets.

—All is free to soldiers,
To the weary heroes
Who have bled, and soaked
The whole earth in their sacrificial blood,
Who have with their bare flesh clogged
The crazy wheels of Juggernaut,
Freed the peoples from the dragon that devoured
them,

That scorched with greed their pleasant fields and villages,
Their quiet delightful places:

So they of the frock-coats, amid wreaths and flags victorious,
To the crowds in the flaring squares,
And a murmurous applause
Rises like smoke to mingle in the sky
With the crashing of the bells.

But, resounding in the sky,
Louder than the tramp of feet,
Louder than the crash of bells,
Louder than the blare of bands, victorious,
Shrieks the inextinguishable laughter of the gods.

The old houses rock with it,
And wag their great peaked heads,
The old gates shake,
And the pavings ring with it,

As with the iron tramp of old fighters,
As with the clank of heels of the victorious,
By long ages vanquished.
The spouts in the gurgling fountains
Wrinkle their shiny griffin faces,
Splash the rhythm in their ice-fringed basins—
Of the inextinguishable laughter of the gods.

And far up into the inky sky,
Where great trailing clouds stride across the world,
Darkening the spired cities,
And the villages folded in the hollows of hills,
And the shining cincture of railways,
And the pale white twining roads,
Sounds with the stir of quiet monotonous breath
Of men and women stretched out sleeping,
Sounds with the thin wail of pain
Of hurt things huddled in darkness,
Sounds with the victorious racket

Of speeches and soldiers drinking,

Sounds with the silence of the swarming dead--

The inextinguishable laughter of the gods.

IX

O I would take my pen and write
In might of words
A pounding dytheramb
Alight with teasing fires of hate,
Or drone to numbness in the spell
Of old loves long lived away
A drowsy vilanelle.
O I would build an Ark of words,
A safe ciborium where to lay
The secret soul of loveliness.
O I would weave of words in rhythm
A gaudily wrought pall
For the curious cataphalque of fate.

But my pen does otherwise.

All I can write is the orange tinct with crimson
of the beaks of the goose

and of the wet webbed feet of the geese
that crackle the skimming of ice
and curve their white plump necks to the water
in the manure-stained rivulet
that runs down the broad village street;
and of their cantankerous dancings and hissings,
with beaks tilted up, half open
and necks stiffly extended;
and the curé's habit blowing in the stinging wind
and his red globular face
like a great sausage burst in the cooking
that smiles
as he takes the shovel hat off his head with a gesture,
the hat held at arm's length,
sweeping a broad curve, like a censor well swung;
and, beyond the last grey gabled house in the village,
the gaunt Christ
that stretches bony arms and tortured hands

to embrace the broad lands leprous with cold
the furrowed fields and the meadows
and the sprouting oats
ghostly beneath the grey bitter blanket of hoar-
frost.

Sausheim

X

In a hall on Olympus we held carouse,
Sat dining through the warm spring night,
Spilling of the crocus-colored wine
Glass after brimming glass to rouse
The ghosts that dwell in books to flight
Of word and image that, divine,
In the draining of a glass would tear
The lies from off reality,
And the world in gaudy chaos spread
Naked-new in the throbbing flare
Of songs of long-fled spirits;—free
For the wanderer devious roads to tread.

Names waved as banners in our talk:
Lucretius, his master, all men who to balk
The fear that shrivels us in choking rinds
Have thrown their souls like pollen to the winds,

Erasmus, Bruno who burned in Rome, Voltaire,
All those whose lightning laughter cleaned the air
Of the minds of men from the murk of fear-sprung gods,
And straightened the backs bowed under the rulers' rods.

A hall full of the wine and chant of old songs,
Smelling of lilacs and early roses and night,
Clamorous with the names and phrases of the throngs
Of the garlanded dead, and with glasses pledged to the light
Of the dawning to come . . .

O in the morning we would go
Out into the drudging world and sing
And shout down dustblinded streets, hollo
From hill to hill, and our thought fling

Abroad through all the drowsy earth
To wake the sleeper and the worker and the jailed
In walls cemented of lies to mirth
And dancing joy; laughingly unveiled
From the sick mist of fear to run naked and leap
And shake the nations from their snoring sleep.

O in the morning we would go
Fantastically arrayed
In silk and scarlet braid,
In rich glitter like the sun on snow
With banners of orange, vermillion, black,
And jasper-handed swords,
Anklets and tinkling gauds
Of topaz set twistingly, or lac
Laid over with charms of demons' heads
In indigo and gold.
Our going a music bold
Would be, behind us the twanging threads

Of mad guitars, the wail of lutes
In wildest harmony;
Lilting thumping free,
Pipes and kettledrums and flutes
And brazen braying trumpet-calls
Would wake each work-drowsed town
And shake it in laughter down,
Untuning in dust the shuttered walls.

O in the morning we would go
With doleful steps so dragging and slow
And grievous mockery of woe
And bury the old gods where they lay
Sodden drunk with men's pain in the day,
In the dawn's first new burning white ray
That would shrivel like dead leaves the sacred lies,
The avengers, the graspers, the wringers of sighs,
Of blood from men's work-twisted hands, from their eyes

Of tears without hope . . . But in the burning
day
Of the dawn we would see them brooding to slay,
In a great wind whirled like dead leaves away.

In a hall on Olympus we held carouse,
In our talk as banners waving names,
Songs, phrases of the garlanded dead.

Yesterday I went back to that house . . .
Guttered candles where were flames,
Shattered dust-grey glasses instead
Of the fiery crocus-colored wine,
Silence, cobwebs and a mouse
Nibbling nibbling the moulded bread
Those spring nights dipped in vintage divine
In the dawnward chanting of our last carouse.

1918—1919

VAGONES DE TERCERA

Refrain

HARD ON YOUR RUMP

BUMP BUMP

HARD ON YOUR RUMP

BUMP BUMP

I

O the savage munching of the long dark train
crunching up the miles
crunching up the long slopes and the hills
that crouch and sprawl through the night
like animals asleep,
gulping the winking towns
and the shadow-brimmed valleys
where lone trees twist their thorny arms.

The smoke flares red and yellow;
the smoke curls like a long dragon's tongue
over the broken lands.

The train with teeth flashing
gnaws through the piecrust of hills and plains
greedy of horizons.

Alcazar de San Juan

II

TO R. H.

I invite all the gods to dine
on the hard benches of my third class coach
that joggles over brown uplands
dragged at the end of a rattling train.

I invite all the gods to dine,
great gods and small gods, gods of air
and earth and sea, and of the grey land
where among ghostly rubbish heaps and cast-out
things
linger the strengthless dead.

I invite all the gods to dine,
Jehovah and Crepitus and Sebek,
the slimy crocodile . . . But no;
wait . . . I revoke the invitation.

For I have seen you, crowding gods,
hungry gods. You have a drab official look.
You have your pockets full of bills,
claims for indemnity, for incense unsniffed
since men first jumped up in their sleep
and drove you out of doors.

Let me instead, O djinn that sows the stars
and tunes the strings of the violin,
have fifty lyric poets,
not pale parson folk, occasional sonneteers,
but sturdy fellows who ride dolphins,
who need no wine to make them drunk,
who do not fear to meet red death at the meanads'
hands
or to have their heads at last
float vine-crowned on the Thracian sea.

Anacreon, a partridge-wing?
A sip of wine, Simonides?
Algy has gobbled all the pastry

and left none for the Elizabethans
who come arm in arm, singing bawdy songs,
smelling of sack, from the Mermaid. Ronsard,
will you eat nothing, only sniff roses?
Those Anthologists have husky appetites!
There's nothing left but a green banana
unless that galleon comes from Venily
with Hillyer breakfasts wrapped in sonnet-paper.

But they've all brought gods with them!
Avaunt! Take them away, O djinn
that paints the clouds and brings in the night
in the rumble and clatter of the train
cadences out of the past . . . Did you not see
how each saved a bit out of the banquet
to take home and burn in quiet to his god?

Madrid, Caceres, Portugal

III

Three little harlots
with artificial roses in their hair
each at a window of a third-class coach
on the train from Zafra to the fair.

Too much powder and too much paint
shining black hair.
One sings to the clatter of wheels
a swaying unending song
that trails across the crimson slopes
and the blue ranks of olives
and the green ranks of vines.
Three little harlots
on the train from Zafra to the fair.

The plowman drops the traces
on the shambling oxen's backs

turns his head and stares
wistfully after the train.

The mule-boy stops his mules
shows his white teeth and shouts
a word, then urges dejectedly
the mules to the road again.

The stout farmer on his horse
straightens his broad felt hat,
makes the horse leap, and waves
grandiosely after the train.

Is it that the queen Astarte
strides across the fallow lands
to fertilize the swelling grapes
amid shrieking of her corybants?

Too much powder and too much paint
shining black hair.
Three little harlots
on the train from Zafra to the fair.

Sevilla—Merida

IV

My desires have gone a-hunting,
circle through the fields and sniff along the hedges,
hounds that have lost the scent.

Outside, behind the white swirling patterns of
coalsmoke,
hunched fruit-trees slide by
slowly pirouetting,
and poplars and aspens on tiptoe
peer over each other's shoulders
at the long black rattling train;
colts sniff and fling their heels in air
across the dusty meadows,
and the sun now and then
looks with vague interest through the clouds
at the blonde harvest mottled with poppies,
and the Joseph's cloak of fields, neatly sewn to-
gether with hedges,

that hides the grisly skeleton
of the elemental earth.

My mad desires
circle through the fields and sniff along the hedges,
hounds that have lost the scent.

Misto

V

VIRGEN DE LAS ANGUSTIAS

The street is full of drums
and shuffle of slow moving feet.
Above the roofs in the shaking towers
the bells yawn.

The street is full of drums
and shuffle of slow moving feet.
The flanks of the houses glow
with the warm glow of candles,
and above the upturned faces,
crowned, robed in a cone-shaped robe
of vast dark folds glittering with gold,
swaying on the necks of men, swaying
with the strong throb of drums,
haltingly she advances.

What manner of woman are you,
borne in triumph on the necks of men,

you who look bitterly
at the dead man on your knees,
while your foot in an embroidered slipper
tramples the new moon?

Haltingly she advances,
swaying above the upturned faces
and the shuffling feet.

In the dark unthought-of years
men carried you thus
down streets where drums throbbed
and torches flared,
bore you triumphantly,
mourner and queen,
followed you with shuffling feet
and upturned faces.
You it was who sat
in the swirl of your robes
at the granary door,
and brought the orange maize

black with mildew
or fat with milk, to the harvest:
and made the ewes
to swell with twin lambs,
or bleating, to sicken among the nibbling flock.
You wept the dead youth
laid lank and white in the empty hut,
sat scarring your cheeks with the dark-cowled
women.
You brought the women safe
through the shrieks and the shuddering pain
of the birth of a child;
and, when the sprouting spring
poured fire in the blood of the young men,
and made the he-goats dance stiff-legged
in the sloping thyme-scented pastures,
you were the full-lipped wanton enchantress
who led on moonless nights,
when it was very dark in the high valleys,
the boys from the villages

to find the herd-girls among the munching sweet-
breathed cattle
beside their fires of thyme-sticks,
on their soft beds of sweet-fern.

Many names have they called you,
Lady of laughing and weeping,
shuffling after you, borne
on the necks of men down town streets
with drums and red torches:
dolorous one, weeping the dead
youth of the year ever dying,
or full-breasted empress of summer,
Lady of the Corybants
and the headlong routs
that maddened with cymbals and shouting
the hot nights of amorous languor
when the gardens swooned under the scent
of jessamine and nard.
You were the slim-waisted Lady of Doves,

you were Ishtar and Ashtaroth,
for whom the Canaanite girls
gave up their earrings and anklets and their own
slender bodies,
you were the dolorous Isis,
and Aphrodite.
It was you who on the Syrian shore
mourned the brown limbs of the boy Adonis.
You were the queen of the crescent moon,
the Lady of Ephesus,
giver of riches,
for whom the great temple
reeked with burning and spices.
And now in the late bitter years,
your head is bowed with bitterness;
across your knees lies the lank body
of the Crucified.

Rockets shriek and roar and burst
against the velvet sky;

the wind flutters the candle-flames
above the long white slanting candles.

Swaying above the upturned faces
to the strong throb of drums,
borne in triumph on the necks of men,
crowned, robed in a cone-shaped robe
of vast dark folds glittering with gold
haltingly, through the pulsing streets,
advances Mary, Virgin of Pain.

Granada

VI

TO R. J.

It would be fun, you said,
sitting two years ago at this same table,
at this same white marble café table,
if people only knew what fun it would be
to laugh the hatred out of soldiers' eyes . . .

—If I drink beer with my enemy,
you said, and put your lips to the long glass,
and give him what he wants, if he wants it so hard
that he would kill me for it,
I rather think he'd give it back to me—
You laughed, and stretched your long legs out
across the floor.

I wonder in what mood you died,
out there in that great muddy butcher-shop,
on that meaningless dicing-table of death.

Did you laugh aloud at the futility,
and drink death down in a long draught,
as you drank your beer two years ago
at this same white marble café table?
Or had the darkness drowned you?

Café Oro del Rhin

Plaza de Santa Ana

VII

Down the road
against the blue haze
that hangs before the great ribbed forms of the
mountains
people come home from the fields;
they pass a moment in relief
against the amber frieze of the sunset
before turning the bend
towards the twinkling smoke-breathing village.

A boy in sandals with brown dusty legs
and brown cheeks where the flush of evening
has left its stain of wine.
A donkey with a jingling bell
and ears askew.
Old women with waterjars
of red burnt earth.
Men bent double under burdens of faggots

that trail behind them the fragrance
of scorched uplands.
A child tugging at the end of a string
a much inflated sow.
A slender girl who presses to her breast
big bluefrilled cabbages.
And a shepherd in the clinging rags of his cloak
who walks with lithe unhurried stride
behind the crowded backs of his flock.

The road is empty
only the swaying tufts of oliveboughs
against the fading sky.

Down on the steep hillside
a man still follows the yoke
of lumbering oxen
plowing the heavy crimson-stained soil
while the chill silver mists
steal up about him.

I stand in the empty road
and feel in my arms and thighs
the strain of his body
as he leans far to one side
and wrenches the plow from the furrow,
feel my blood throb in time to his slow careful steps
as he follows the plow in the furrow.

Red earth
giver of all things
of the yellow grain and the oil
and the wine to all gods sacred
of the fragrant sticks that crackle in the hearth
and the crisp swaying grass
that swells to dripping the udders of the cows,
of the jessamine the girls stick in their hair
when they walk in twos and threes in the moonlight,
and of the pallid autumnal crocuses . . .
are there no fields yet to plow?

Are there no fields yet to plow
where with sweat and straining of muscles
good things may be wrung from the earth
and brown limbs going home tired through the
evening?

Lanjaron

VIII

O such a night for scaling garden walls;
to push the rose shoots silently aside
and pause a moment where the water falls
into the fountain, softly troubling the wide
bridge of stars tremblingly mirrored there
terror-pale and shaking as the real stars shake
in crystal fear lest the rustle of silence break
with a watchdog's barking.

O to scale the garden wall and fling
my life into the bowl of an adventure,
stake on the silver dice the past and future
forget the odds and lying in the garden sing
in time to the flutter of the waiting stars
madness of love for the slender ivory white
of her body hidden among dark silks where
is languidest the attar weighted air.

To drink in one strong jessamine scented draught
sadness of flesh, twining madness of the night.

O such a night for scaling garden walls;
yet I lie alone in my narrow bed
and stare at the blank walls, forever afraid,
of a watchdog's barking.

Granada

IX

Rain-swelled the clouds of winter
drag themselves like purple swine across the plain.
On the trees the leaves hang dripping
fast dripping away all the warm glamour
all the ceremonial paint of gorgeous bountiful
autumn.

The black wet boles are vacant and dead.
Among the trampled leaves already mud
rot the husks of the rich nuts. On the hills
the snow has frozen the last pale crocuses
and the winds have robbed the smell of the thyme.

Down the wet streets of the town
from doors where the light spills out orange
over the shining irregular cobbles
and dances in ripples on gurgling gutters;
sounds the zambomba.

In the room beside the slanting street
round the tray of glowing coals
in their stained blue clothes, dusty
with the dust of workshops and factories,
the men and boys sit quiet;
their large hands dangle idly
or rest open on their knees
and they talk in soft tired voices.
Crosslegged in a corner a child with brown hands
sounds the zambomba.

Outside down the purple street
stopping sometimes at a door, breathing deep
the heady wine of sunset, stride with clattering
steps
those to whom the time will never come
of work-stiffened unrestless hands.

The rain-swelled clouds of winter roam
like a herd of swine over the town and the dark
plain.

The wineshops full of shuffling and talk, tanned
faces
bright eyes, moist lips moulding desires
blow breaths of strong wine in the faces of passers-
by.

There are guards in the storehouse doors
where are gathered the rich fruits of autumn, the
grain
the sweet figs and raisins; sullen blood tingling
to madness
they stride by who have not reaped.
Sounds the zambomba.

Albaicin

X

The train throbs doggedly
over the gleaming rails
fleeing the light-green flanks of hills
dappled with alternate shadow of clouds,
fleeing the white froth of orchards,
of clusters of apples and cherries in flower,
fleeing the wide lush meadows,
wealthy with cowslips,
and the tramping horses and backward-strained
bodies of plowmen,
fleeing the gleam of the sky in puddles and glittering waters
the train throbs doggedly
over the ceaseless rails
spurning the verdant grace
of April's dainty apparel;

so do my desires
spurn those things which are behind
in hunger of horizons.

Rapido: Valencia—Barcelona

1919—1920

QUAI DE LA TOURNELLE

I

See how the frail white pagodas of blossom
stand up on the great green hills
of the chestnuts
and how the sun has burned the wintry murk
and all the stale odor of anguish
out of the sky
so that the swollen clouds bellying with sail
can parade in pomp like white galleons.

And they move the slow plumed clouds
above the spidery grey webs of cities
above fields full of golden chime
of cowslips
above warbling woods where the ditches
are wistfully patined
with primroses pale as the new moon
above hills all golden with gorse
and gardens frothed

to the brim of their grey stone walls
with apple bloom, cherry bloom,
and the raspberry-stained bloom of peaches and
almonds.

So do the plumed clouds sail
swelling with satiny pomp of parade
towards somewhere far away
where in a sparkling silver sea
full of little flakes of indigo
the great salt waves have heaved and stirred
into blossoming of foam,
and lifted on the rush of the warm wind
towards the gardens and the spring-mad cities of
the shore
Aphrodite Aphrodite is reborn.

And even in this city park
galled with iron rails
shrill with the clanging of ironbound wheels
on the pavings of the unquiet streets,

little children run and dance and sing
with spring-madness in the sun,
and the frail white pagodas of blossom
stand up on the great green hills
of the chestnuts
and all their tiers of tiny gargoyle faces
stick out gold and red-striped tongues
in derision of the silly things of men.

Jasdin du Luxembourg

II

The shadows make strange streaks and mottled
arabesques
of violet on the apricot-tinged walks
where the thin sunlight lies
like flower-petals.

On the cool wind there is a fragrance
indefinable
of strawberries crushed in deep woods.

And the flushed sunlight,
the wistful patterns of shadow
on gravel walks between tall elms
and broad-leaved lindens,
the stretch of country,
yellow and green,
full of little particolored houses,

and the faint intangible sky,

have lumped my soggy misery,

like clay in the brown deft hands of a potter,

and moulded a song of it.

Saint Germain-en-Laye

III

In the dark the river spins,
Laughs and ripples never ceasing,
Swells to gurgle under arches,
Swishes past the bows of barges,
in its haste to swirl away
From the stone walls of the city
That has lamps that weight the eddies
Down with snaky silver glitter,
As it flies it calls me with it
Through the meadows to the sea.

I close the door on it, draw the bolts,
Climb the stairs to my silent room;
But through the window that swings open
Comes again its shuttle-song,
Spinning love and night and madness,
Madness of the spring at sea.

IV

The streets are full of lilacs
lilacs in boys' buttonholes
lilacs at women's waists;
arms full of lilacs, people trail behind them
through the moist night
long swirls of fragrance,
fragrance of gardens
fragrance of hedgerows where they have wandered
all the May day
where the lovers have held each others hands
and lavished vermillion kisses
under the portent of the swaying plumes
of the funereal lilacs.

The streets are full of lilacs
that trail long swirls and eddies of fragrance
arabesques of fragrance

like the arabesques that form and fade
in the fleeting ripples of the jade-green river.

Porte Maillot

V

As a gardener in a pond
splendid with lotus and Indian nenuphar
wades to his waist in the warm black water
stooping to this side and that to cull the snaky
stems
of the floating white glittering lilies
groping to break the harsh stems of the imperious
lotus
lifting the huge flowers high
in a cluster in his hand
till they droop against the moon;
so I grope through the streets of the night
culling out of the pool
of the spring-reeking, rain-reeking city
gestures and faces.

Place St. Michel

VI

TO A. K. MC C.

This is a garden
where through the russet mist of clustered trees
and strewn November leaves,
they crunch with vainglorious heels
of ancient vermillion
the dry dead of spent summer's greens,
and stalk with mincing sceptic steps
and sound of snuffboxes snapping
to the capping of an epigram,
in fluffy attar-scented wigs . . .
the exquisite Augustans.

Tuileries

VII

They come from the fields flushed
carrying bunches of limp flowers
they plucked on teeming meadows
and moist banks scented of mushrooms.

They come from the fields tired
softness of flowers in their eyes
and moisture of rank sprouting meadows.

They stroll back with tired steps
lips still soft with the softness of petals
voices faint with the whisper of woods;
and they wander through the darkling streets
full of stench of bodies and clothes and merchandise
full of the hard hum of iron things;
and into their cheeks that the wind had burned and the sun

that kisses burned out on the rustling meadows
into their cheeks soft with lazy caresses
comes sultry
caged breath of panthers
fetid, uneasy
fury of love sprouting hot in the dust and stench
of walls and clothes and merchandise,
pent in the stridence of the twilight streets.

And they look with terror in each other's eyes
and part their hot hands stained with grasses and
flowerstalks
and are afraid of their kisses.

VIII

EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHERE

AFTER WATTEAU

The mists have veiled the far end of the lake
this sullen amber afternoon;
our island is quite hidden, and the peaks
hang wan as clouds above the ruddy haze.

Come, give your hand that lies so limp,
a tuberose among brown oak-leaves;
put your hand in mine and let us leave
this bank where we have lain the day long.

In the boat the naked oarsman stands.
Let us walk faster, or do you fear to tear
that brocaded dress in apricot and grey?
Love, there are silk cushions in the stern
maroon and apple-green,
crocus-yellow, crimson, amber-grey.

We will lie and listen to the waves
slap soft against the prow, and watch the boy
slant his brown body to the long oar-stroke.

But, love, we are more beautiful than he.
We have forgotten the grey sick yearning nights
brushed off the old cobwebs of desire;
we stand strong
immortal as the slender brown boy who waits
to row our boat to the island.

But love how your steps drag.

And what is this bundle of worn brocades I press
so passionately to me? Old rags of the past,
snippings of Helen's dress, of Melisande's,
scarfs of old paramours rotted in the grave
ages and ages since.

No lake
the ink yawns at me from the writing table.

IX

LA RUE DU TEMPS PASSE

Far away where the tall grey houses fade
A lamp blooms dully through the dusk,
Through the effacing dusk that gently veils
The traceried balconies and the wreaths
Carved above the shuttered windows
Of forgotten houses.

Behind one of the crumbled garden walls
A pale woman sits in drooping black
And stares with uncomprehending eyes
At the thorny angled twigs that bore
Years ago in the moon-spun dusk
One scarlet rose.

In an old high room where the shadows troop
On tiptoe across the creaking boards
A shrivelled man covers endless sheets

Rounding out in his flourishing hand
Sentence after sentence loud
With dead kings' names.

Looking out at the vast grey violet dusk
A pale boy sits in a window, a book
Wide open on his knees, and fears
With cold choked fear the thronging lives
That lurk in the shadows and fill the dusk
With menacing steps.

Far away the gaslamp glows dull gold
A vague tulip in the misty night.
The clattering drone of a distant tram
Grows loud and fades with a hum of wires
Leaving the street breathless with silence, chill
And the listening houses.

Bordeaux

X

O douce Sainte Geneviève
ramène moi a ta ville, Paris.

In the smoke of morning the bridges
are dusted with orangy sunshine.

Bending their black smokestacks far back
muddling themselves in their spiralling smoke
the tugboats pass under the bridges
and behind them
stately
gliding smooth like clouds
the barges come
black barges
with blunt prows spurning the water gently
gently rebuffing the opulent wavelets
of opal and topaz and sapphire,
barges casually come from far towns
towards far towns unhurryingly bound.

The tugboats shrieks and shrieks again
calling beyond the next bend and away.
In the smoke of morning the bridges
are dusted with orangy sunshine.

O douce Sainte Geneviève
ramène moi a ta ville, Paris.

Big hairy-hoofed horses are drawing
carts loaded with flour-sacks,
white flour-sacks, bluish
in the ruddy flush of the morning streets.

On one cart two boys perch
wrestling and their arms and faces
glow ruddy against the white flour-sacks
as the sun against the flour-white sky.

O douce Sainte Geneviève
ramène moi a ta ville, Paris.

Under the arcade
loud as castanettes with steps

of little women hurrying to work
an old hag who has a mole on her chin
that is tufted with long white hairs
sells incense-sticks, and the trail of their strangeness lingers
in the many-scented streets
among the smells of markets and peaches
and the must of old books from the quays
and the warmth of early-roasting coffee.

The old hag's incense has smothered
the timid scent of wild strawberries
and triumphantly mingled with the strong reek from the river
of green slime along stonework of docks
and the pitch-caulked decks of barges,
barges casually come from far towns
towards far towns unhurryingly bound.

O douce Sainte Geneviève
ramène moi a ta ville, Paris.

XI

A L'OMBRE DES JEUNES FILLES EN FLEURS

And now when I think of you
I see you on your piano-stool
finger the ineffectual bright keys
and even in the pinkish parlor glow
your eyes sea-grey are very wide
as if they carried the reflection
of mocking black pinebranches
and unclimbed red-purple mountains
    mist-tattered
under a violet-gleaming evening.

But chirruping of marriageable girls
voices of eager, wise virgins,
no lamp unlit every wick well trimmed,
fill the pinkish parlor chairs,

bobbing hats and shrill tinkling teacups
in circle after circle about you
so that I can no longer see your eyes.

Shall I tear down the pinkish curtains
smash the imitation ivory keyboard
that you may pluck with bare fingers on the
strings?

I sit cramped in my chair.
Futility tumbles everlastingly
like great flabby snowflakes about me.

Were they in your eyes, or mine
the tattered mists about the mountains
and the pitiless grey sea?

1919

ON FOREIGN TRAVEL

I

Grey riverbanks in the dusk
Melting away into mist
A hard breeze sharp off the sea
The ship's screws' lunge and throb
And the voices of sailors singing.

O I have come wandering
Out of the dust of many lands
Ears by all tongues jangled
Feet worn by all arduous ways—
O the voices of sailors singing.

What nostalgia of sea
And free new-scented spaces
dreams of towns vermillion-gated
Must be in their blood as in mine
That the sailors long so in singing.

Churned water marbled astern
Grey riverbanks in the dusk
Melting away into mist
And a shrill wind hard off the sea.
O the voices of sailors singing.

II

Padding lunge of a camel's stride
turning the sharp purple flints. A man sings:

Breast deep in the dawn
a queen of the east;
the woolen folds of her robe
hang white and straight
as the hard marble columns
of the temple of Jove.

A thousand days
the pebbles have scuttled
under the great pads of my camels.

A thousands days
like bite of sour apples
have been bitter with desire in my mouth.

A thousand days
of cramped legs flecked
with green slobber of dromedaries.

At the crest of the road
that transfixes the sun
she awaits
me lean with desire
with muscles tightened
by these thousand days
pallid with dust
sinewy
naked before her.

Padding lunge of a camel's stride
over the flint-strewn hills. A man sings:

I have heard men sing songs
of how in scarlet pools
in the west in purpurate mist
that bursts from the sun trodden

like a grape under the feet of darkness
a woman with great breasts
thighs white like wintry mountains
bathes her nakedness.

I have lain biting my cheeks
many nights with ears murmurous
with the songs of these strange men.
My arms have stung as if burned
by the touch of red ants with anguish
to circle strokingly
her bulging smooth body.
My blood has soured to gall.
The ten toes of my feet are hard
as buzzards' claws from the stones
of roads, from clambering
cold rockfaces of hills.
For uncountable days' journeys
jouncing on the humps of camels
iron horizons have swayed

like the rail of a ship at sea
mountains have tossed like wine
shaken hard in a wine cup.

I have heard men sing songs
of the scarlet pools of the sunset.

Two men, bundled pyramids of brown
abreast, bow to the long slouch
of their slowstriding camels.
Shrilly the yellow man sings:

In the courts of Han
green fowls with carmine tails
peck at the yellow grain
court ladies scatter
with tiny ivory hands,
the tails of the fowls
droop with multiple elegance
over the wan blue stones
as the hands of courtladies

droop on the goldstiffened silk
of their angular flower-embroidered dresses.

In the courts of Han
little hairy dogs
are taught to bark twice
at the mention of the name of Confucius.

The twittering of the women
that hop like silly birds
through the courts of Han
became sharp like little pins
in my ears, their hands in my hands
rigid like small ivory scoops
to scoop up mustard with
when I had heard the songs
of the western pools where the great queen
is throned on a purple throne
in whose vast encompassing arms
all bitter twigs of desire
burst into scarlet bloom.

Padding lunge of the camel's stride
over flint-strewn hills. The brown man sings:

On the house-encumbered hills
of great marble Rome
no man has ever counted the columns
no man has ever counted the statues
no man has ever counted the laws
sharply inscribed in plain writing
on tablets of green bronze.

At brightly lit tables
in a great brick basilica
seven hundred literate slaves
copy on rolls of thin parchment
adorned by seals and purple bows
the taut philosophical epigrams
announced by the emperor each morning
while taking his bath.

A day of rain and roaring gutters
the wine-reeking words of a drunken man

who clenched about me hard-muscled arms
and whispered with moist lips against my ear
filled me with smell and taste of spices
with harsh panting need to seek out the great
calm implacable queen of the east
who erect against sunrise holds in the folds
of her woolen robe all knowledge of delight
against whose hard white flesh my flesh
will sear to cinders in a last sheer flame.

Among the house-encumbered hills
of great marble Rome
I could no longer read the laws
inscribed on tablets of green bronze.
The maxims of the emperor's philosophy
were croaking of toads in my ears.
A day of rain and roaring gutters
the wine-reeking words of a drunken man:
. . . breast deep in the dawn
a queen of the east.

The camels growl and stretch out their necks,
their slack lips jiggle as they trot
towards a water hole in a pebbly torrent bed.

The riders pile dry twigs for a fire
and gird up their long gowns to warm
at the flame their lean galled legs.

Says the yellow man:

You have seen her in the west?

Says the brown man:

Hills and valleys
stony roads.
In the towns
the bright eyes of women
looking out from lattices.
Camps in the desert
where men passed the time of day
where were embers of fires

and greenish piles of camel-dung.

You have seen her in the east?

Says the yellow man:

Only red mountains and bare plains,
the blue smoke of villages at evening,
brown girls bathing
along banks of streams.

I have slept with no woman
only my dream.

Says the brown man:

I have looked in no woman's eyes
only stared along eastward roads.

They eat out of copper bowls beside the fire in silence.
They loose the hobbles from the knees of their camels

and shout as they jerk to their feet.
The yellow man rides west.
The brown man rides east.

Their songs trail among the split rocks of the desert.

Sings the yellow man:

I have heard men sing songs
of how in the scarlet pools
that spurt from the sun trodden
like a grape under the feet of darkness
a woman with great breasts
bathes her nakedness.

Sings the brown man:

After a thousand days
of cramped legs flecked
with green slobber of dromedaries
she awaits

me lean with desire

pallid with dust

sinewy

naked before her.

Their songs fade in the empty desert.

III

There was a king in China.

He sat in a garden under a moon of gold
while a black slave scratched his back
with a back-scratcher of emerald.
Beyond the tulip bed
where the tulips were stiff goblets of fiery wine
stood the poets in a row.

One sang the intricate patterns of snowflakes
One sang the henna-tipped breasts of girls dancing
and of yellow limbs rubbed with attar.
One sang red bows of Tartar horsemen
and whine of arrows and blood-clots on new spear-
shafts.
The others sang of wine and dragons coiled in
purple bowls,

and one, in a droning voice
recited the maxims of Lao Tse.

(Far off at the walls of the city
groaning of drums and a clank of massed spearmen.
Gongs in the temples.)

The king sat under a moon of gold
while a black slave scratched his back
with a back-scratcher of emerald.
The long gold nails of his left hand
twined about a red tulip blotched with black,
a tulip shaped like a dragon's mouth
or the flames bellying about a pagoda of sandal-
wood.
The long gold nails of his right hand
were held together at the tips
in an attitude of discernment:
to award the tulip to the poet
of the poets that stood in a row.

(Gongs in the temples.
Men with hairy arms
climbing on the walls of the city.
They have red bows slung on their backs;
their hands grip new spearshafts.)

The guard of the tomb of the king's great grandfather
stood with two swords under the moon of gold.
With one sword he very carefully
slit the base of his large belly
and inserted the other and fell upon it
and sprawled beside the king's footstool.
His blood sprinkled the tulips
and the poets in a row.

(The gongs are quiet in the temples.
Men with hairy arms
scattering with taut bows through the city;
there is blood on new spearshafts.)

The long gold nails of the king's right hand
were held together at the tips
in an attitude of discernment.
The geometrical glitter of snowflakes,
the pointed breasts of yellow girls
crimson with henna,
the swirl of river-eddies about a barge
where men sit drinking,
the eternal dragon of magnificence. . . .
Beyond the tulip bed
stood the poets in a row.

The garden full of spearshafts and shouting
and the whine of arrows and the red bows of
Tartars
and trampling of the sharp hoofs of war-horses.
Under the golden moon
the men with hairy arms
struck off the heads of the tulips in the tulip-bed
and of the poets in a row.

The king lifted the hand that held the flaming
dragon-flower.

Him of the snowflakes, he said.
On a new white spearshaft
the men with hairy arms
spitted the king and the black slave
who scratched his back with a back-scratcher of
emerald.

There was a king in China.

IV

Says the man from Weehawken to the man from
Sioux City
as they jolt cheek by jowl on the bus up Broadway:
—That's her name, Olive Thomas, on the red
skysign,
died of coke or somethin'
way over there in Paris.
Too much money. Awful
immoral the lives them film stars lead.

The eye of the man from Sioux City glints
in the eye of the man from Weehawken.
Awful . . . lives out of sky-signs and lust;
curtains of pink silk fluffy troubling the skin
rooms all prinkly with chandeliers,
bed cream-color with pink silk tassles
creased by the slender press of thighs.
Her eyebrows are black

her lips rubbed scarlet
breasts firm as peaches
gold curls gold against her cheeks.
She dead
all of her dead way over there in Paris.

O golden Aphrodite.

The eye of the man from Weehawken slants
away from the eye of the man from Sioux City.
They stare at the unquiet gold dripping sky-signs.

PHASES OF THE MOON

I

Again they are plowing the field by the river;
in the air exultant a smell of wild garlic
crushed out by the shining steel in the furrow
that opens softly behind the heavy-paced horses,
dark moist noisy with fluttering of sparrows;
and their chirping and the clink of the harness
chimes like bells;
and the plowman walks at one side
with sliding steps, his body thrown back from the
waist.
O the sudden sideways lift of his back and his arms
as he swings the plow from the furrow.

And behind the river sheening blue
and the white beach and the sails of schooners,
and hoarsely laughing the black crows
wheel and glint. Ha! Haha!

Other springs you answered their laughing
and shouted at them across the fallow lands
that smelt of wild garlic and pinewoods and earth.

This year the crows flap cawing overhead Ha!
Haha!
and the plow-harness clinks
and the pines echo the moaning shore.

No one laughs back at the laughing crows.
No one shouts from the edge of the new-plowed
field.

Sandy Point

II

The full moon soars above the misty street
filling the air with a shimmer of silver.
Roofs and chimney-pots cut silhouettes
of dark against the milk-washed sky!
O moon fast waning!

Seems only a night ago you hung
a shallow cup of topaz-colored glass
that tilted towards my feverish dry lips
brimful of promise in the flaming west:
O moon fast waning!

And each night fuller and colder, moon,
the silver has welled up within you; still I
I have not drunk, only the salt tide
of parching desires has welled up within me:
only you have attained, waning moon.

The moon soars white above the stony street,
wan with fulfilment. O will the tide

of yearning ebb with the moon's ebb
leaving me cool darkness and peace
with the moon's waning?

Madrid

III

The shrill wind scatters the bloom
of the almond trees
but under the bark of the shivering poplars
the sap rises
and on the dark twigs of the planes
buds swell.

Out in the country
along soggy banks of ditches
among busy sprouting grass
there are dandelions.
Under the asphalt
under the clamorous paving-stones
the earth heaves and stirs
and all the blind live things
expand and writhe.

Only the dead
lie still in their graves,

stiff, heiratic,
only the changeless dead
lie without stirring.

Spring is not a good time
for the dead.

Battery Park

IV

Buildings shoot rigid perpendiculars
latticed with window-gaps
into the slate sky.

Where the wind comes from
the ice crumbles
about the edges of green pools;
from the leaping of white thighs
comes a smooth and fleshly sound,
girls grip hands and dance
grey moss grows green under the beat
of feet of saffron
crocus-stained.

Where the wind comes from
purple windflowers sway
on the swelling verges of pools,
naked girls grab hands and whirl

fling heads back
stamp crimson feet.

Buildings shoot rigid perpendiculars
latticed with window-gaps
into the slate sky.

Garment-workers loaf in their overcoats
(stare at the gay breasts of pigeons
that strut and peck in the gutters).
Their fingers are bruised tugging needles
through fuzzy hot layers of cloth,
thumbs roughened twirling waxed thread;
they smell of lunchrooms and burnt cloth.
The wind goes among them
detaching sweat-smells from underclothes
making muscles itch under overcoats
tweaking legs with inklings of dancetime.

Bums on park-benches
spit and look up at the sky.

Garment-workers in their overcoats
pile back into black gaps of doors.

Where the wind comes from
scarlet windflowers sway
on rippling verges of pools,
sound of girls dancing
thud of vermillion feet.

Madison Square

V

The stars bend down
through the dingy platitude of arc-lights
as if they were groping for something among the
houses,
as if they would touch the gritty pavement
covered with dust and scraps of paper and piles of
horse-dung
of the wide deserted square.

They are all about me;
they sear my body.
How very cold the stars are touching my body.
What do they seek
the fierce ice-flames of the stars
in the platitude of arc-lights?

Plaza Mayor, Madrid

VI

Not willingly have I wronged you O Eros,
it is the bitter blood of joyless generations
making my fingers loosen suddenly
about the full glass of purple wine
for which my dry lips ache,
making me turn aside from the wide arms of lovers
that would have slaked the rage of my body
for supple arms and burning young flushed faces
to wander in solitary streets.

A funeral clatters over the glimmering cobbles;
they are burying despair!
Lank horses whose raw bones show through
the embroidered black caparisons
and whose heads jerk feebly
under the tall nodding crests;
they are burying despair.
A great hearse that trundles crazily along

under pompous swaying plumes
and intricate designs of mud-splashed heraldry;
they are burying despair!
A coffin obliterated under the huge folds
of a faded velvet pall
and following clattering over the cobblestones
lurching through mud-puddles
a long train of cabs
rain-soaked barouches
old landaus off which the paint has peeled
leprous coupés;
in their blank windows shines the glint
of interminable gaslamps;
they are burying despair!

Joyously I turn into the wineshop
where with strumming of tambourines
and staccato cackle of castanets
they are welcoming the new year,
and I look in the eyes of the woman;

(are they your wide eyes O Eros?)
who sits with wine-dabbled lips
and stained tinsel dress torn open
by the brown hands of strong young lovers;
(were they your brown hands O Eros?).

—Your flesh is hot to my cold hands
hot to thaw the ice of an old curse
now that with pomp of plumes and strings of
ceremonial cabs
they are burying despair.

She laughs and points with a skinny forefinger
at the flabby yellow breasts that hang
over the tarnished tinsel of her dress,
and shows me her brown wolf's teeth;
and the blood in my temples goes suddenly cold
with bitterness and I know
it was not despair that they buried.

New Year's Day—Casa de Bottin

VII

The leaves are full grown now
and the lindens are in flower.
Horseshoes leave their mark
on the sun-softened asphalt.
Men unloading vegetable carts
along the steaming market curb
bare broad chests pink from sweating;
their wet shirts open to the last button
cling to their ribs and shoulders.

The leaves are full grown now
and the lindens are in flower.

At night along the riverside
glinting watery lights
sway upon the lapping waves
like many-colored candles that flicker in the wind.

The warm wind smells of pitch from the moored
barges
smells of the broad leaves of the trees
wilted from the day's long heat;
smells of gas from the last taxicab.

Sounds of the riverwater rustling
circumspectly past the piers
of bridges that span the glitter with dark
of men and women's voices
many voices mouth to mouth
smoothness of flesh touching flesh,
a harsh short sigh blurred into a kiss.

The leaves are full grown now
and the lindens are in flower.

Quai Malaquais

VIII

In me somewhere is a grey room
my fathers worked through many lives to build;
through the barred distorting windowpanes
I see the new moon in the sky.

When I was small I sat and drew
endless pictures in all colors on the walls;
tomorrow the pictures should take life
I would stalk down their long heroic colonnades.

When I was fifteen a red-haired girl
went by the window; a red sunset
threw her shadow on the stiff grey wall
to burn the colors of my pictures dead.

Through all these years the walls have writhed
with shadow overlaid upon shadow.
I have bruised my fingers on the windowbars
so many lives cemented and made strong.

While the bars stand strong, outside
the great processions of men's lives go past.
Their shadows squirm distorted on my wall.

Tonight the new moon is in the sky.

Stuyvesant Square

IX

Three kites against the sunset
flaunt their long-tailed triangles
above the inquisitive chimney-pots.

A pompous ragged minstrel
sings beside our dining-table
a very old romantic song:

I love the sound of the hunting-horns
deep in the woods at night.

A wind makes dance the fine acacia leaves
and flutters the cloths of the tables.
The kites tremble and soar.
The voice throbs sugared into croaking base
broken with the burden of the too ancient songs.

And yet, beyond the flaring sky,
beyond the soaring kites,

where are no voices of singers,
no strummings of guitars,
the untarnished songs
hang like great moths just broken
through the dun threads of their cocoons,
moist, motionless, limp
as flowers on the inaccessible twigs
of the yewtree, Ygdrasil,
the untarnished songs.

Will you put your hand in mine
pompous street-singer,
and start on a quest with me?
For men have cut down the woods where the laurel grew
to build streets of frame houses,
they have dug in the hills after iron
and frightened the troll-king away;
at night in the woods no hunter puffs out his cheeks
to call to the kill on the hunting-horn.

Now when the kites flaunt bravely
their tissue-paper glory in the sunset
we will walk together down the darkening streets
beyond these tables and the sunset.

We will hear the singing of drunken men
and the songs whores sing
in their doorways at night
and the endless soft crooning
of all the mothers,
and what words the young men hum
when they walk beside the river
their arms hot with caresses,
their cheeks pressed against their girls' cheeks.

We will lean very close
to the quiet lips of the dead
and feel in our worn-out flesh perhaps
a flutter of wings as they soar from us
the untarnished songs.

But the minstrel sings as the pennies clink:
I love the sound of the hunting-horns
deep in the woods at night.

O who will go on a quest with me
beyond all wide seas
all mountain passes
and climb at last with me
among the imperishable branches
of the yewtree, Ygdrasil,
so that all the limp unuttered songs
shall spread their great moth-wings and soar
above the craning necks of the chimneys
above the tissue-paper kites and the sunset
above the diners and their dining-tables,
beat upward with strong wing-beats steadily
till they can drink the quenchless honey of the
moon.

Place du Tertre

X

Dark on the blue light of the stream
the barges lie anchored under the moon.

On icegreen seas of sunset
the moon skims like a curved white sail
bellied by the evening wind
and bound for some glittering harbor
that blue hills circle
among the purple archipelagos of cloud.

So, in the quivering bubble of my memories
the schooners with peaked sails
lean athwart the low dark shore;
their sails glow apricot-color
or glint as white as the salt-bitten shells on the beach
and are curved at the tip like gulls' wings:
their courses are set for impossible oceans

where on the gold imaginary sands
they will unload their many-scented freight
of very childish dreams.

Dark on the blue light of the stream
the barges lie anchored under the moon;
the wind brings from them to my ears
faint creaking of rudder-cords, tiny slappings
of waves against their pitch-smeared flanks,
to my nose a smell of bales and merchandise
the wet familiar smell of harbors
and the old arousing fragrance
making the muscles ache and the blood seethe
and the eyes see the roadsteads and the golden
beaches
where with singing they would furl the sails
of the schooners of childish dreams.

On icegreen seas of sunset
the moon skims like a curved white sail:
had I forgotten the fragrance of old dreams

that the smell from the anchored barges
can so fill my blood with bitterness
that the sight of the scudding moon
makes my eyes tingle with salt tears?

In the ship's track on the infertile sea
now many childish bodies float
rotting under the white moon.

Quai des Grands Augustins

XI

Lua cheia esta noit

Thistledown clouds
cover the whole sky
scurry on the southwest wind
over the sea and islands;
somehow in the sundown
the wind has shaken out plumed seed
of thistles milkweed asphodel,
raked from off great fields of dandelions
their ghosts of faded golden springs
and carried them in billowing of mist
to scurry in moonlight
out of the west.

They hide the moon
the whole sky is grey with them
and the waves.

They will fall in rain
over country gardens
where thrushes sing.

They will fall in rain
down long sparsely lighted streets
hiss on silvery windowpanes
moisten the lips
of girls leaning out
to stare after the footfalls of young men
who splash through the glimmering puddles
with nonchalant feet.

They will slap against the windows of offices
where men in black suits
shaped like pears
rub their abdomens
against frazzled edges of ledgers.

They will drizzle
over new-plowed fields

wet the red cheeks of men harrowing
and a smell of garlic and clay
will steam from the new-sowed land
and sharp-eared young herdsmen will feel
in the windy rain
lisp of tremulous love-makings
interlaced soundless kisses
impact of dead springs
nuzzling tremulous at life
in the red sundown.

Shining spring rain
O scud steaming up out of the deep sea
full of portents of sundown and islands,
beat upon my forehead
beat upon my face and neck
glisten on my outstretched hands,
run bright lilac streams
through the clogged channels of my brain
corrode the clicking cogs the little angles

the small mistrustful mirrors
scatter the shrill tiny creaking
of mustnot darenot cannot
spatter the varnish off me
that I may stand up
my face to the wet wind
and feel my body
and drenched salty palpitant April
reborn in my flesh.

I would spit the dust out of my mouth
burst out of these stiff wire webs
supple incautious
like the crocuses that spurt up too soon
their saffron flames
and die gloriously in late blizzards
and leave no seed.

Off Pico

XII

Out of the unquiet town
seep jagged barkings
lean broken cries
unimaginable silent writhing
of muscles taut against strangling
heavy fetters of darkness.

On the pool of moonlight
clots and festers
a great scum
of worn-out sound.

(Elagabalus, Alexander
looked too long at the full moon;
hot blood drowned them
cold rivers drowned them.)

Float like pondflowers
on the dead face of darkness
cold stubs of lusts
names that glimmer ghostly
adrift on the slow tide
of old moons waned.

(Lais of Corinth that Holbein drew
drank the moon in a cup of wine;
with the flame of all her lovers' pain
she seared a sign on the tombs of the years.)

Out of the voiceless wrestle of the night
flesh rasping harsh on flesh
a tune on a shrill pipe shimmers
up like a rocket blurred in the fog
of lives curdled in the moon's glare,
staggering up like a rocket
into the steely star-sharpened night
above the stagnant moon-marshes
the song throbs soaring and dies.

(Semiramis, Zenobia
lay too long in the moon's glare;
their yearning grew sere and they died
and the flesh of their empires died.)

On the pool of moonlight
clots and festers
a great scum
of worn-out lives.

No sound but the panting unsatiated
breath that heaves under the huge pall
the livid moon has spread above the housetops.
I rest my chin on the window-ledge
and wait.
There are hands about my throat.

Ah Bilkis, Bilkis
where the jangle of your camel bells?
Bilkis when out of Saba
lope of your sharp-smelling dromedaries

will bring the unnameable strong wine
you press from the dazzle of the zenith
over the shining sand of your desert
the wine you press there in Saba?
Bilkis your voice loud above the camel bells
white sword of dawn to split the fog,
Bilkis your small strong hands to tear
the hands from about my throat.
Ah Bilkis when out of Saba?

Pe:a Palace

THE END

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Dos Passos, John, 1896-1970.
A pushcart at the curb

[redacted]

Dos Passos
A pushcart at the curb.

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